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### Reciprocity| A dynamic interrelationship between the human body and the land

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*The University of Montana*

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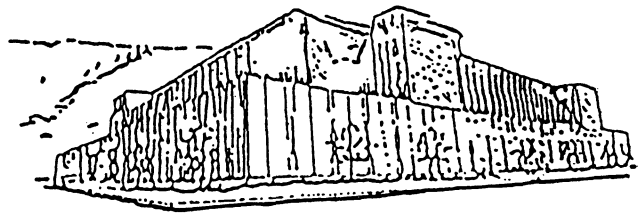
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RECIPROCITY:  
A DYNAMIC INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE HUMAN BODY AND  
THE LAND.

by

Deborah Thompson Peabody

A.O.C.A. The Ontario College of Art, 1984

B.A. Prescott College, 1987

presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements

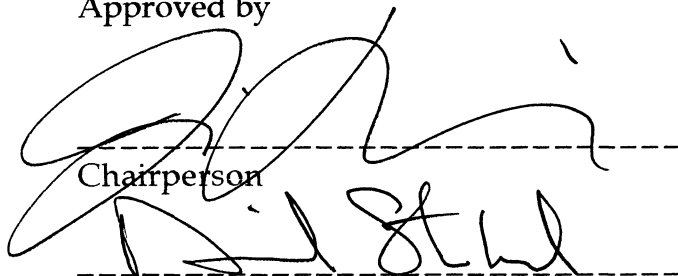
for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts


The University of Montana

1997

Approved by

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Chairperson

A smaller, more legible handwritten signature in black ink, written over a horizontal dashed line.  
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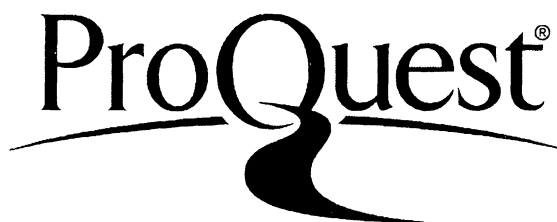
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## I. Introduction

*To the sensing body, no thing presents itself as utterly passive or inert. Only by affirming the animateness of perceived things do we allow our words to emerge directly from the depths of our ongoing reciprocity with the world.*

*David Abram*

*The center clears. Knowing comes:  
The body is not singular like a corpse,  
but singular like a salt grain  
still in the side of the mountain.*

*Rumi*

Over the past fifteen years I have worked in the field of environmental education as an instructor in wilderness living and travel. During this time I have had the privilege of living and teaching in some breathtaking landscapes I have seen landscapes that inspire awe and wonder and have undertaken physical journeys across landscapes that command attention and commitment. These have been formative experiences for me. The insight gained in my relationship to the land has influenced my way of perceiving the world.

My thesis work is inspired by experiences on the land. The paintings express a way of knowing the land through the body and are explorations of my belief that a primal connection between the human body and the land exists, a connection that has led me to conceive of the land and body as one.

This connection is difficult to describe, but it is one that I know deep within my own experience. It is an internal feeling. It resonates throughout my body, engaging all of my senses, like diving naked into a clear blue river. It is halting and demands my attention. First, it affects my body on a sensory level, then it informs my thinking and perception of this experience. This sort of experience stays with me; I feel it strongly, as if my body and the land were exchanging some sort of energy, as if the land and I were in dialogue. It is this same exchange of energy that I feel when I am deep into my painting process or when I stand before a painting by Emily Carr or Mark Rothko. I

leave the paint, the canvas and the conscious mind and engage in a reciprocal dialogue of an intuitive nature.

The imagery in my paintings represents this reciprocal relationship between the body and the land by uniting them in an integrated body/landscape, a place where the visceral interiority of the body merges with the robust exterior expression of the land. It is a place where the body and the land find a common denominator, a matrix. I perceive this matrix as the flesh of the earth.

I am intrigued with this vision of a matrix, with the idea that we share some connection with the land that goes beyond utilitarian perspectives of our bodies and the land as separate entities. Our culture has taught us to see things in fragments, to see things out of a greater context, and from a non-participatory stance. Our ability to see the reciprocal relationship of the body to the land has been blocked by this conceptual framework. Our common ground has been reduced to isolated, autonomous mechanisms instead of a web of interrelated and dynamic systems. We are in danger of losing this participatory connection to nature and thus the continued expansion of the infinitely rich and creative expression that comes from this relationship.

My work is about opening up this reciprocal relationship between the body and the land. This phenomenon that I have experienced creates a desire to share this experience so that others may question their inward connection to the land as well.

## II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

*A habit of mind obscures vision.*

*Susan Griffin*

*I was stone; mysterious stone;  
my breach was a violent one, my birth  
like a wounding estrangement,  
but now I should like to return  
to that certainty,  
to the peace of the center, the matrix,  
of mothering stone.*

*Pablo Neruda*

As I work through drafts of this paper, I realize that I am bringing together the formative events of my life. A good portion of the influences on my thesis work are life experiences, with the remainder coming from academic and artistic influences. My influences gathered together seem to merge into a mosaic that could read like one of my paintings; busy, warm and layered.

As my work is about my body's relationship to the land, I will begin with a brief history of my body. When I was an infant, I had a very serious case of spinal meningitis. The repercussions of this illness left me physically disabled for most of my childhood. I went through numerous 'corrective surgeries', often spending my summers unable to walk. It was during my recovery periods that I began to draw and paint. Painting was my world of adventure and discovery. At some point in my early teens I decided that I did not want any more operations and that what I needed instead was to use my body. I did not accept the idea that I was limited physically and began to pursue activities that interested me. I believe that my childhood struggles have impacted my life in two ways: they caused me to discover the richness of creativity and they gave me a burning desire to move my body! Through the world of outdoor education, moving of my body came to be a cherished joy. Simultaneously, my love of wild places was born. The world I have created

on canvas for my thesis began with the union of these two experiences.

After art college, my love of outdoor education eventually lead me to the canyon country of southern Utah to work for a small outdoor education school. The red rock landscape with its sensuous forms and intense sunlight struck me immediately. The warm colors of the sandstones and the anthropomorphic formations spoke to me of the body. The land also echoed with the presence of generations of desert cultures who once made this area their home.

Through my work with the school, I was able to study the cultures of the Anasazi and the present cultures of the Navajo and Hopi people. I worked with rock art researchers, archeologists, and archeoastronomers, all of whom filled my imagination with the majesty of this region. I perceived the landscape as animated, where the presence of humanity emanated from the red rocks. My years in the canyons made a lasting impact on me. The imagery in my paintings is full of forms from this strange landscape, which I have thought of as the earth inverted. The colors and light of the southwest still creep into my paintings.

In 1992-3, another formidable experience from my work as an outdoor educator took place in Kenya. As part of the semester course during which I was working, the students and instructors traveled with the Masai people through their land. We participated in several of their goat-roasting ceremonies. The visceral process of killing the goats, cutting it open, dividing its body into various edible parts, then roasting it over a large fire was profoundly memorable to me. The handling of the organs and cooking the meat was very tactile. Often we would carry limbs or cooked organs with us for days to continue eating as we traveled through the land. More than any other, this experience, as well as the overall organic aspect of their lives remains with me, not in a romanticized sense but in a way that recalls the sensory aspects of that experience. I cannot separate these people from the land and the animals that sustain them. They are interwoven. I remember the blood of the goat falling into the red, dusty earth and the texture of the

soles of the Massai's feet as if they themselves were made of trodden earth. It was a visceral experience for me. This experience more than any other brought the body and the land together.

I continue to work in the field of outdoor education, mostly in Alaska or northern Canada, these days. I return to the northern lands for the love of the wildness I find out there and in myself when I am living in that environment. Being in this rough and raw land makes my body feel incredibly alive. My body rejoices in returning to the land. My mind gains clarity of thought and purpose. The land is vast and vital. My immersion in it enables me to be fully present. I come back home full of the land and wanting to paint of this experience..

Beyond the physical aspects of my work in outdoor education, I question my relationship to the environment and inspire students to question their relationship to it as well. Over the years, my quest has been to read and bring into discourse the ideas and philosophies of environmental and natural history writers. Among my favorites are: Aldo Leopold, Annie Dillard, Barry Lopez, David Abrams and Terry Tempest Williams, as well as, poets such as: Mary Oliver, Susan Griffin, and Rumi who speak so gracefully of their responses and relationships with the land.

I read a lot of writing by Barry Lopez and I often re-read essays and chapters from his books finding new richness in his metaphors and intimate identity with various landscapes. He has written a lot on the arctic and canyon country, two of the landscapes in which I most treasure as well. Lopez does part of his research for these various landscapes by spending time out in them. His experience on the land resonates in his writing for me. He gives us access to the landscape through a personal and yet also cultural experience. He has said, in his book "Arctic Dreams", that "Landscape is the culture that contains all human cultures."<sup>1</sup> Lopez never stops being human and never disregards humane ways of experiencing nature. He expresses awe at the differences between elements of the natural world and his ability to interact with this dynamic world. In this way, his writing brings us to a new way of

perceiving nature. It has helped shape my ideas about the co-evolving nature of the human/non-human interaction.

One of the more dynamic and on-going influences in my life is my relationship with my husband Phil. In discussions on the subjects of environmental ethics and conceptual paradigms, Phil encouraged me to take an Ecofeminism course offered by the Philosophy Department and taught by Deborah Slicer. This course has been a significant influence on my personal ideology and thus my art. Among all of the ideas presented through this course, the writing of poet and philosopher Susan Griffin impacted my thinking the most. We studied her book, "Woman and Nature" in class. The work is rich in visual and metaphorical symbolism taken from the female body and nature. Her ideas suggest a way of re-imagining western culture that is not oppressive to women or nature, but instead sees all of nature in a relationship of respect and awe. In this way, she spoke directly to my ideas and the imagery behind my thesis:

*One speaks of living on the earth but in truth life is held within the earth. An atmosphere woven from life circles the planet. Every movement, every breath, every response, the least thought is shaped to the curve of this mass. Even time and space bend to it. Like a child in a womb, all we know exist inside this outer body. And all is dependent on it.<sup>2</sup>*

I wrote my paper, "EcoFeminist Ethics in the Visual Arts" for this class in such a way that it would allow me to do a survey of the feminist art movement of the 1970s-1990s. I found the parallels between the first generation of feminist artists, including Judy Chicago, Hannah Wilke and Eva Hesse, and my work intriguing in that these artists expressed, through their imagery, a way of knowing that is centered around the body. I certainly felt that my work has ties with this idea and that some of the visual language being presented in their work has similarities to mine. This investigation helped me see my work more clearly, and to accept the evolution of my imagery.

My introduction to the visual arts and my passion for painting began

through my exposure to the landscape paintings of the "Group of Seven". The importance of this group's work to Canadians is culturally significant. The Canadian landscape is big, robust and alive. It's northern boundaries are visually fuzzy, white and indefinable. Yet, it is an icon of our identity. The immense scale of the country occupies the imaginations of most Canadians. I believe it is this sense of Canada that resonates most poignantly in these painters. It also strikes a chord with me.

The "Group of Seven" consists of Frank Carmichael , A.J. Casson, Lawren Harris, A.Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer, J.E.H. MacDonald and F.H. Varley. The group came together in 1920 to exhibit their work and to share their passion of the north country. I was also impressed by the painting of two associated artists, Tom Thomson and Emily Carr.

I feel that my aesthetic and ideal of what a landscape painting is comes from this group of painters. Their extravagant use of paint and handling of the painted surface spoke of their personal experience with the land, and the large scale of their paintings gave them a physical presence that engaged the viewer. Their landscapes were about experiences of intimacy and wonder. They used color in a way that departed from local color and brought a sense of vibrant animation to the land. They inspired me to be a painter. They painted on location, spending many months of the year in remote sections of Northern Ontario, somewhere on that edge of the Canadian imagination.

Lawren Harris's late paintings seem poetically beautiful to me. For example in his painting "Pic Island" (plate 1) Harris reduces the arctic landscape to sensuous and simple forms. His elimination of details suggests an essence of the landscape that seems to go beyond the physical landscape to a spiritual expression of the landscape. Franklin Varely's uses color in a vibrant way, often playing with the juxtaposition of warm and cool colors. He pushes warm colors into receding areas of the painting and cool color into advancing areas, which I feel gives his work a unique vibrancy. His palette has an organic look to it with the use of subtle complementary grays and contrasts achieved without the use of black and white based values. This is



something that I like to do in my work and yet find very difficult to make work. I remember doing a copy of A.Y. Jackson's "Grey Day, Laurentians", (plate 2), while in elementary school. It was one of my favorite paintings which I had seen many times in the McMichael Collection. Looking at this now, I recall my intrigue with the handling of the snowy hills, the strange light transforming the snow into golds, yellows, greens and edges of cobalt blue. My work often contains a similar sense of direct saturated light.

I also looked at the paintings of Tom Thomson quite often. His work departs from local color more than any member of the group. His color use seemed to be much more expressionistic than the other members for this reason. Through his compositional choices he seemed to want to take us into the landscape, into the forest, into the clouds, and thus, present us with a more confined or intimate landscape. This too has affected my use of pictorial space.

The paintings of Emily Carr are still some of my favorite and I refer to them when I seek inspiration. As my ability to express my relationship to the land increases, her work speaks more powerfully to me. The vital animation that she portrays through her sweeping forests, and rhythmic landscapes has inspired the use of gesture in my work. Her work has an emotional element that comes from her depiction of deep forest interior. She seems to take us in to a place she both desires and fears. I respond to this aspect of her imagery. I like to do this in my work as well. She once said that, "The liveliness in me loves to feel the liveliness in growing things."<sup>3</sup> I find great excitement in this aspect of her work, as well as her determination and courage to go into those remote coastal forests to paint what she was passionate about.

Growing up in Toronto and attending the Ontario College of Art there, I was surrounded by numerous collections of Henry Moore's work: bronze sculptures, maquettes, drawings and plaster pieces. During my years at the Ontario College of Art I studied his work, particularly his biomorphic and anthropomorphic forms. I was interested in the way he extracted references from nature like bones and metamorphosized them into figurative forms.

Looking back at these forms, I see a lot of similarity to the canyon country formations that intrigued me and to the forms that emerge in my work.

My attraction to the body's interior also began when I was studying at the Ontario College of Art. I was curious about the field of medical illustration. So I befriended a medical illustrator and gained access to a medical lab where I could draw from cadavers. I also took an illustration course that focused on anatomy. I had forgotten about this period in my studies until I came across some old, highly detailed anatomical drawings. I now recall the tremendous amount of time I spent in doing them. They are a lot like passages in my current paintings with sinews, tendons, ligaments and muscles moving in and out of forms.

I am also interested in the "Bay Area Painters" of 1950-1965, whose work has the gestural robustness of the New York Abstract Expressionist, but under a California bright sun. It is, of course, also loaded with figure and landscape imagery. Although their work is relatively new to me, I find that I look at their work often and am impressed with their vibrant use of color. It is saturated, yet contains a luminosity that is alive. The quality of light in their paintings also reminds me of the light of southern Utah, where everything is bathed in strong sunlight. This California light comes inside with them and fills interiors as well. I think of David Park's "Standing Male Nude in the Shower" or "Bather with Knee up", painted in 1955 and 1957 respectfully. The intense reds and oranges hold visual weight by the mere layering of brilliant color. I have looked to these reds in my own explorations, wanting to obtain that same saturated luminosity. I have also been influenced by the visible layering of paint, where flickering patches of underpainting colors show through or when a translucent cool color is washed over a vibrant warm color giving it a sense of time as if in another moment the light will change this combination entirely. Richard Diebenkorn, in his work "Interior with Book" painted in 1959, did this well. I have experimented with building up the underpainting up with vibrant, complementary colors, and then allowing parts of the underpainting to come through in the final

painting. This sort of layering adds to the richness of colors I can achieve and also creates a surface depth that adds a sense of history to the image, the painting "Madison County" plate #4 is a good example of my working this way.

I began looking at the paintings and drawings of Elizabeth Murray last year. Murray's use of primary colors struck me as unsophisticated at first, but then I began to really enjoy their vibrancy and immediacy. I think the use of primary colors in my most recent work is partially influenced from looking at her shaped canvases. She depicts a lot of volume and achieves the sense of visual weight by her use of large areas of these intense colors. Her transitions from one hue to another can be abrupt or an optical blending of complementary colors. This too has influenced my painting as well, most notably in the latest works, where I have worked in primary colors and the used monochromatic transitions from one color to the next.

Georgia O'Keefe's smooth and sensuous way of depicting forms and rendering volume speaks to me clearly. I feel that my way of perceiving form is akin to hers as some of my imagery is handled so similarly and my choice of composition, cropping of the subject, abrupt foregrounds, and centering of the image is also similar to hers. In her painting "Purple Hills" (plate 5) she paints a row of hills in such a way that they unfold before us as if it were from the body, soft and sensuous. simple and clear in their depiction. As well, the foreground is handled in such a way that we move quickly into the hills, which fill most of the picture plane. Her paintings have a clear focal point, she seems to selectively isolate elements of the landscape that echo the sensuousness of the land. I have been aware of her work for many years, and having lived near the New Mexico border, I gained a deeper understanding of her love of the canyon country and her choice of symbols to depict the barren and poetic aspects of the land.

In closing, the landscape in which I live and the ones that I spend great amounts of time travelling in, are very important for my visual imagery. The fall light in Montana is remarkable. I go for runs up in the foothills of the

Rattlesnake and watch the grandeur of these evening light shows. They have a lot to teach me about the visual and emotional power of warm/cool color contrasts and atmospheric perspective. I know that the ocher of the dry grass hills has affected my palette, as have the lush greens of spring and the stony grays of winter. My immediate environment affects my work more than I am aware of at the time. In hindsight, I find traces of my home, studio, and landscape environments in my work.

### III. MATERIALS AND TECHNICAL CONCERNS;

*Art is an experience, not an 'object'.*

*Robert Motherwell*

Technically, my painting process is pretty traditional. I usually begin by working from a field sketch. I take this initial sketch through a series of small studies, to explore composition, value and movement. Once I get an image or two that I am excited about, I begin to transfer the image to the canvas. At this point the approach varies considerably, as I often experiment with the way in which I prepare my canvases. For example, I sometimes build up random layers of colors and texture before actually working a specific image into the canvas. As I begin to draw the forms and movements of a new image on my canvas, my thoughts are centered on blocking out the basic forms and gestures of my composition. The painting really begins with the painting of my forms. This is an exciting stage of the painting for me. My approach is playful and free which keeps my painting open and loose. I have been trying to maintain a similar level of spontaneity and playfulness as I work through the entire painting process. Some of my best painting happens when I am in this attitude of playfulness.

I work with acrylics to build the initial underpainting unless I am working into an old oil painting, in which case I work in oils to lay out the composition. Often the color juxtapositions at this stage will remain

dominant throughout the painting. Sometimes a fully realized skeleton of my composition emerges at this stage. Other times, just some key gestural forms are needed to complete the full image.

I leave the acrylic process and begin to work with oils when I want to begin to sculpt my forms. This move to oils is often triggered by a desire to work a specific area of my composition in a more tactile way. The opaqueness of oils and their natural impasto qualities appeal to the expressive needs in my work. Thus, I enjoy the wash qualities I can get with acrylics and the opaque juiciness of oils.

In the earlier stages I tend to work all across the canvas, constantly refiguring the imagery and adjusting color value placements. Some of my paintings are completed within a few weeks and others are reworked, put away, and reworked at a later date. The latter can take months to 'finish'. Probably for every painting that is resolved, several others are eventually painted over, rolled up for storage, or thrown out.

I like to work on several paintings at one time. I find this advantageous for many reasons. It allows the painting of one image to inform another in a dialectical way, and I am also able to leave a painting alone for awhile so that I can study it, while working on other images. This observation time provides an opportunity for me to see qualities in my work that I may have missed if I had worked on it continuously.

I glaze the painting at various stages for a number of reasons: to darken and to make gradual value transitions, to intensify a color, or to alter color and unify areas of the painting with a dominant hue. I use a variety of glaze mediums including Daniel Smith's painting medium, Liquin or a studio mix of damar varnish, cobalt dryer, stand oil and linseed oil. Most of the paintings in my thesis show are on canvas and this has allowed me to reuse stretchers. I like the flexibility of painting on canvas as well as the process of building the stretcher, stretching the canvas, gessoing the canvas, building the underpainting, and of course, the many final layers of painting.

I prefer to have my paintings unframed at this point (although, I will

have several drawings that are framed in my show, for protection purposes mainly). The open edges work better with the concepts of relationship in my thesis. I am suggesting that there are no boundaries between humans and nature, and I am presenting images that aim to involve the viewer in this relationship, thus a frame would seem to me to create a barrier that I am saying does not exist.

## V. DISCUSSION ON AND DEVELOPMENT OF MY THESIS WORK;

*But this knowledge is prohibited. The experience of incarnation is disruptive to a familiar order of the cosmos. Not only sexual experience but every experience contains within it a dangerous knowledge, the direct revelation of the embeddedness of human existence in nature.*

*Susan Griffin*

*Human fulfillment has come to be associated with a certain withdrawal from the natural world, both physically and spiritually, rather than with an integration within it. The human voice that has lost its identity with the voices of the surrounding world is terribly diminished in its capacity for creative expression.*

*Thomas Berry*

When I began working on my M.F.A., I was exploring the idea of trying to express in paint the feelings I had about some specific experiences within various landscapes. For example, I did a series of abstract paintings about a paralyzing nine day snow storm that I waited out during a climbing trip on Mt. Logan, in the Yukon. I was trying to express the humility and sacredness that I felt in this storm. I felt that I was unable to convey my feelings for this experience with non-objective imagery. So, I began to work directly from sketches of the land to express similar ideas.

The paintings from this transition period became the roots of the imagery that appears in my present work. As I worked with these landscape paintings, a figurative or anthropomorphic element began to emerge. I was

also drawing from the figure in an open studio at this time. I decided to explore this emerging element in my work, through a series of paintings with figures transforming or emerging from the earth. Some of my images became ambiguous, referencing both the body and the land, and merging into a variety of biomorphic forms, as in "gestruing forwards" (plate 6) from this period.

I first received comments about an element of sexual content in my work in these paintings, especially in regard to a perceived phallic element in my imagery. I remember clearly my critique with visiting artist Kay Walking Stick who said, "This is erotic energy, this is erotic!" I definitely lost some sleep over that critique. I was not aware of how much my work was about the body. So, I began thinking and investigating this aspect of my work; reading all sorts of writings on the female body and researching other artists, including Louise Bourgeois and Georgia O'Keeffe. Both of their work contains biomorphic forms that seem to relate to the female body. O'Keeffe denied accusations of sexual content in her work. Bourgeois, on the other hand, sees her creation of forms as the "ultimate intimacy with the other" and as a "metamorphosizing merger" with that other. No doubt, my forms can be read as body imagery and perhaps, even erotic or sexual to some people. I have given this much thought and I believe that the emergence of elements of sexuality in my work speak of an intimate relationship between the creative life force and sexual energy, a relationship which I believe to be a synonymous one. I also recognize the importance of these forms to my work as they are the forms of my inner landscape. Accessing this inner landscape is ultimately what I am trying to do in order to create a personal iconography. I was excited that the energy and imagery in my work came across in a way that provoked a response. I realized that the content of my work needs to have erotic implications due to my ideas about a creative life force as mentioned above. However specific issues of gender and sexuality are not the focal point of my work.

I began to realize that I wanted to express my relationship to the land,

through the way I had come to know the land, through my body. This way of knowing is so often ignored in our culture with an emphasis on a mind/body dualism. We often think of matter, be it the earth or our bodies as something to transcend, instead of a source of wisdom and expression. Our bodies are perhaps the primary receptor of experience and our first gesturing towards communication. In my paintings, I wanted my imagery to express the land and the body as places of knowing and expression. I wanted the overall image to read as from the land, but to include a bodily interaction with it, so that we might see ourselves in a dynamic interrelationship with land. I was working on a landscape painting of a sweeping Alaskan valley. I drew a rectangle in the center of the painting and painted that section of the painting in flesh tones. This painting seemed to say, "there we are, in the land", and so I began to explore this juxtaposition of flesh and land. This was the start of a series of paintings that I called my "Flesh Cubes". I stayed with this geometric isolation of the flesh areas for awhile, then began cutting away the flesh panel from the landscape imagery, an obvious allusion to Elizabeth Murray here. For example in my painting "Arroyo" (plate 7) where I cut the door skin panel to physically divide the body or "Flesh Cube" and the land. Although, this series showed some of my conceptual ideas, I was more concerned that the relationship between the 'flesh' and the 'land' be an integrated and reciprocal one. The 'cut outs' left the question open as to whether we were merging with the land or separating from it.

I started to paint the flesh or visceral aspects of my imagery into the landscape trying to achieve a state of visual unity, yet maintaining a distinct tension in the juxtaposition of body and flesh, plate # 8 "red rock". As the flesh components of the paintings became more visceral and internal, I felt the need to explore the 'real thing'. So, I managed to get a few deer organs from a hunter. I keep them frozen on the balcony of my studio and brought them in every morning to thaw, so that I could sketch and paint from them later that day. The heart organ captivated me the most and I worked with it quite a bit. I painted it closed for a while then cut it open. To my amazement a



landscape unfolded that fit with the landscapes of my imagination with veins like snow gullies, muscles rising up like ridges and small pools of blood held in valleys. I did numerous paintings and drawings from this aspect of the heart.

The images from this organ series are some of my favorite works to date. This series is pivotal for a number of formal changes in my work. I began to expand the variety of forms that I was developing in my painting. I also increased the range in scale of imagery within one painting. I worked with a more defined sense of layered imagery. With regard to pictorial space, I began to integrate larger forms with more intricate ones. "Landscape from the Heart", plate #9 illustrates these changes well. I think of this painting often when I am looking for solutions to formal problems in other paintings. I have tried to carry the knowledge gained from this experience over into the main body of my work. I think of this piece as a journey into the landscape of the body. It has a physical presence for me in this sense, much like the journeys I have taken across various landscapes. I am fascinated with the body's interior: the deep chambers, the sinewy connections, the fibrous sheaths, the rich, redness of the flesh, the graceful skeleton and the fluid muscles. It inspires awe and wonder. This aspect of the body is overlooked in our culture. In fact, I feel that we move away from this corporeality and find identification with our bodies on a cosmetic level. This is what artists Cindy Sherman, Kiki Smith and Lucian Freud explore in their work, presenting us with aspects of ourselves that we usually choose not to investigate.

Conceptually, I feel that references to a literal sky in my paintings detracts from the interior element of my imagery. I have worked with developing a figure-ground relationship that is more ambiguous so that the space can be read as sky or interior space. This shift was also necessary to accomplish the spatial ambiguity. I compress the pictorial depth in my paintings by presenting an abrupt foreground and filling the body or middle ground of the painting with large forms. This plus the minimal inclusion of horizon space gives the impression of a compressed space. In this way I feel

that I bring the viewer in to the landscape immediately, and semi-confrontationally. My hope is that it engages the viewer differently than a conventional landscape with great spatial depth would in regard to sensing a corporeal relationship with the image. For me this development of space speaks to the participatory ideas of matter as animate and a source of knowledge that is important to my thesis.

"Escalante Corridor" ( plate 10 ) is a painting that accomplishes my spatial ideas. This body/landscape is compressed in depth with human size forms filling the foreground and a repetition of similar but progressively smaller forms receding into the depth of the painting. Unlike traditional landscapes the images choke the pictorial space. There is little room for any distance from the imagery. The viewer is brought into the work quickly and held within this compressed space. It is a physical space, relating perhaps to an arm's length stretch of distance. This painting is also an example of my interest in concavities of the body and gullies of the land. In all of my paintings there is an area within the composition that moves in with no exit offered to the viewer. I am intrigued by the movement of forms that converge and disappear into these interiors, flowing and folding inwards, like strands of muscle fiber to a tendon or braids of river channels out of a valley. This speaks to me of an exchange, a merging of energy. These areas are important places of the union of forms. I am also aware of a womb-like associations with these interior passages. They have a container or vessel-like form to them like the cupping canyons of the Utah landscape. They offer me a safe and intimate place.

My use of the term matrix in association with my work came before my understanding of this aspect of my work. I use the term matrix to refer to a common 'mold' or substance from which all life arises. Within the body, this would be the womb and from the land this would be the earth's core or mantle. I like this overlap in meaning and association. The image of a matrix appears again and again in my work at times dominating the painting, such as in 'Escalante Corridor'(plate 10) and 'Matrix' ( plate 12).

As I explored the visceral and internal aspects of the body the color red began to dominate my paintings. Its inclusion brought about an immediate changes in the work, allowing me access to the 'interior landscape' of my imagination. It has opened up new color relationships because it is a very passionate color for me. I think that using it has taught me a lot about painting. Red is not a neutral color and it carries some powerful associations for people. My work does not sit easily with some people and can have responses that vary from sensual to horrific. I am not always comfortable with the latter response, yet, I feel that I am being true to my vision at this point in my development.

After my explorations with real organs, my landscapes contained an organ or internal body image somewhere within the composition. A part of the painting would read as body part, and the rest of the image would be developed as an exterior landscape. Some of the pieces in my show were done with this sort of formal arrangement, such as "Tundra Ridges" (plate 11). In this painting I worked a portion of the landscape as if it were an organ, suggesting through the placement and painting of the flesh component that the human body is a integral part of the landscape. As I continued to paint in this way, the image of a organ began to integrate into the entire image in a way that is less contrived and more "organic". The movement of colors and forms that reference the interior began to flow more naturally and the separate images from the body and the land merged into a more unified land/bodyscape. It is difficult for me to say that a specific form in my work is more from the body or the land. Instead they are forms informed by both the land and the body. The painting titled 'Reciprocity' (plate 13) is a good example of this integrated body/landscape. The red areas of the forms read both as interior and exterior components of the image. The colors and shape of the forms give a sense of merging and diverging, folding inwards and pushing outwards to create an image of a body of forms in a dynamic interrelationship: a reciprocity. Although this painting was inspired by a sketch from the Tombstone Range in the Yukon, it has departed from that

reference to become its own entity and reads as a dynamic interrelationship of body and land imagery.

## V. SUMMARY

The recuperation of the incarnate, sensorial dimension of experience brings with it a recuperation of the living landscape in which we are corporeally embedded.

David Abram

To define the self as relational, rather than as separate and self-contained, could actually bring about a new stage in our social and cultural evolution.

Suzy Gablik

My thesis work is an expression of my relationship to the land. This relationship is based upon an experiential way of knowing the land, one that has engaged my body and altered my perception of nature. I feel an empathy towards the land that has allowed me to see the land as a dynamic, living entity with which we share a vital energy. The manifestation of this empathetic relationship is seen in my paintings as a merging of the land and the body into one animated body/landscape.

Working in this context over the past two and a half years has provided a catalyst for me to investigate seemingly divergent ideas and issues that converge in my work. It has also brought into discourse a tapestry of experiential and artistic influences that are interwoven components in my paintings. My thesis work has been an opening up of formal concerns and conceptual ideass which will provide interesting avenues for me to explore in the future. It has been a place to express and question my relationship to my body and the land and it is my hope that those viewing my work will be inspired to do the same.

My work relates to my life in that it is constantly being influenced by the events of my life, and in turn, my paintings call upon me to question my place and participation in this world. It is a reciprocity between art and life.

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Barry Lopez from "Arctic Dreams" Bantam Books, N.Y. 1986

<sup>2</sup> Susan Griffin from a collection of essays called "Eros of Everyday Life, Essays on Ecology, Gender and Society" Anchor Books, Doubleday. 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Quote from Doris Shadbolts book "The Art and Life of Emily Carr" Douglas and McIntyre. 1987

**List of Illustration:**

- Plate 1 Lawren Harris, "Pic Island", 1924, Oil on Canvas 121.9 X 152.4cm.
- Plate 2 A.Y. Jackson, " Gray Day, Laurentians", 1933, o/c 53.3 X 66 cm.
- Plate 3 Emily Carr, "Forest", 1931, o/c 24 X 36".
- Plate 4 Georgia O'Keefe, "Purple Hills", 1935, o/c 16 1/8 X 30 1/8".
- Plate 5 Deb Peabody, "Madison County", 1997, Acrylic and Oil on Canvas 96 x 50".
- Plate 6 Deb Peabody, "Gesturing forward", 1996, a/o/c 30 x 56.
- Plate 7 Deb Peabdy, "Arroyo", 1996, a/o/c 36 x 36.
- Plate 8 Deb Peabody, "Red Rock", 1996, a/o/c 62 x 50.
- Plate 9 Deb Peabody, "Landscape from the Heart", 1997, a/o/c 66 x 48.
- Plate 10 Deb Peabody, "Escalante Canyon", 1997, a o/c 56 x65.
- Plate 11 Deb Peabody, "Tundra Ridges", 1997, a/o/c 72 x 84.
- Plate 12 Deb Peabody, "Matrix", 1997, a/o/c 68 x 53.
- Plate 13 Deb Peabody, "Reciprocity", 1997, a/o/c 96 x 72.
- Plate 14 Deb Peabody, "Arctic Soltice", 1997, a/o/c 96 x72.

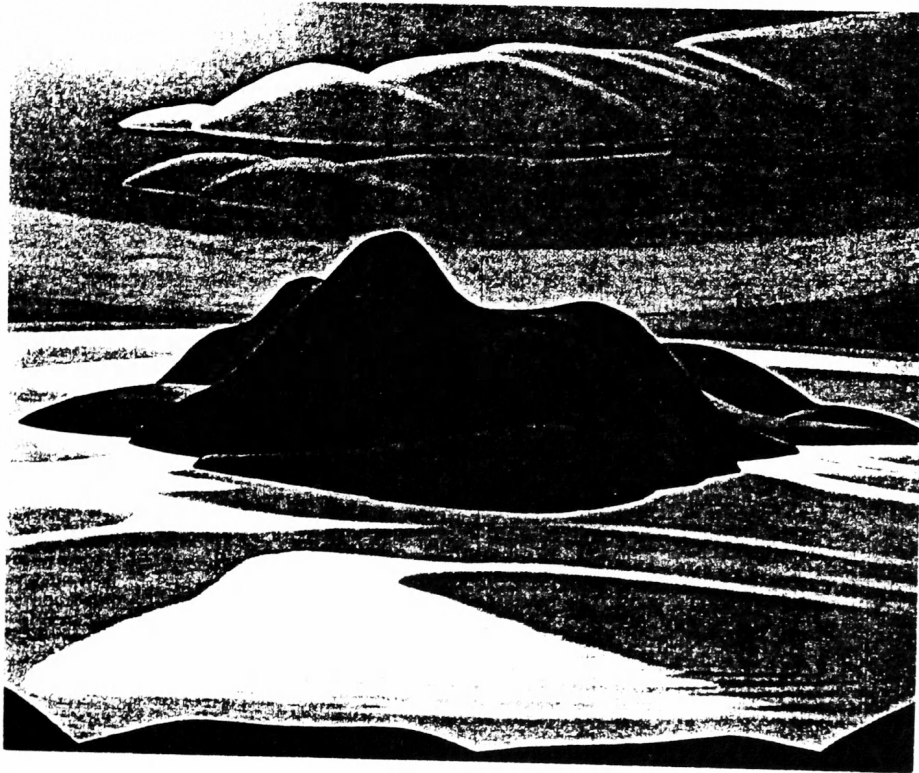


Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3

Plate 4

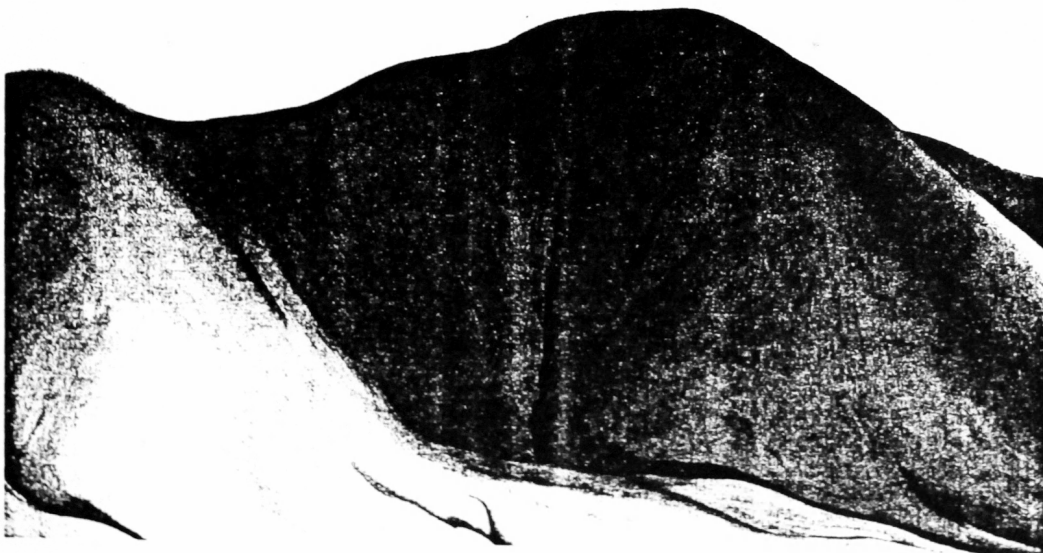






Plate 5



Plate 6



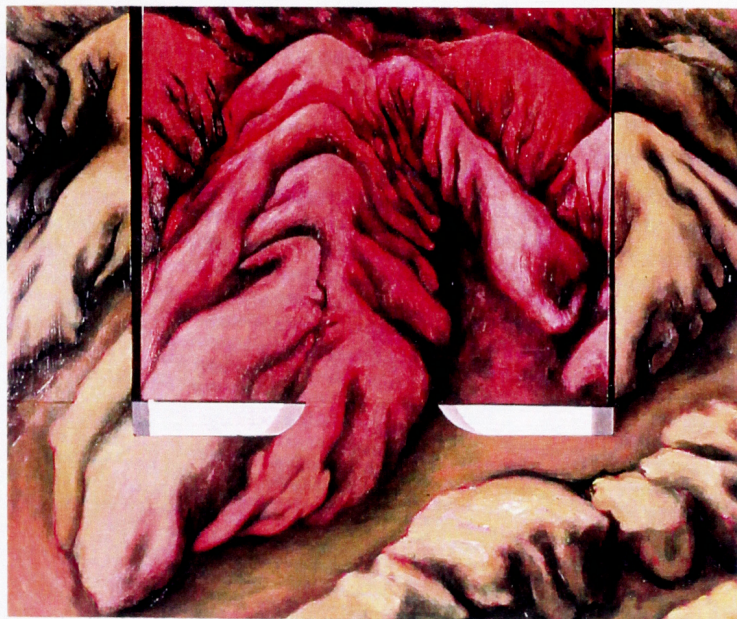


Plate 7

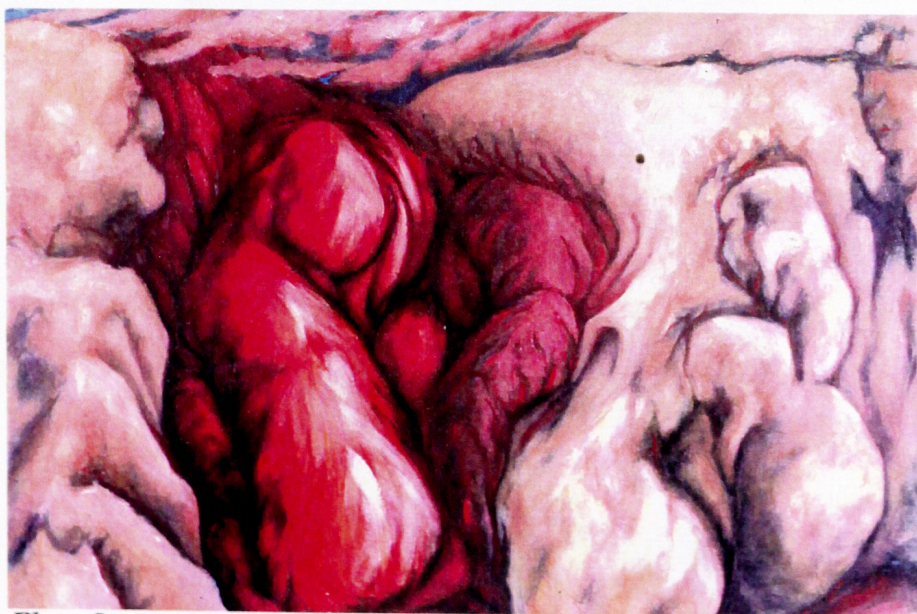


Plate 8





Plate 9

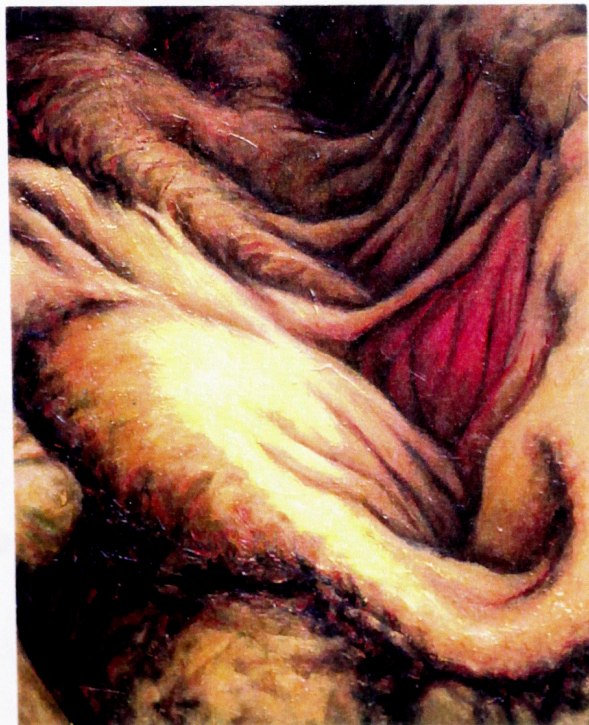


Plate 10





Plate 11

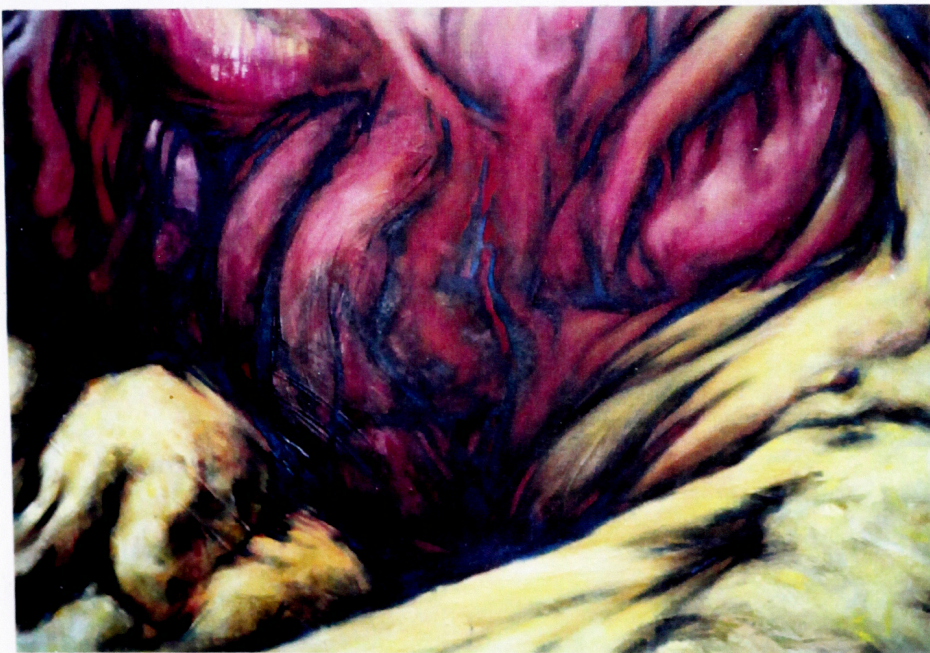


Plate 12



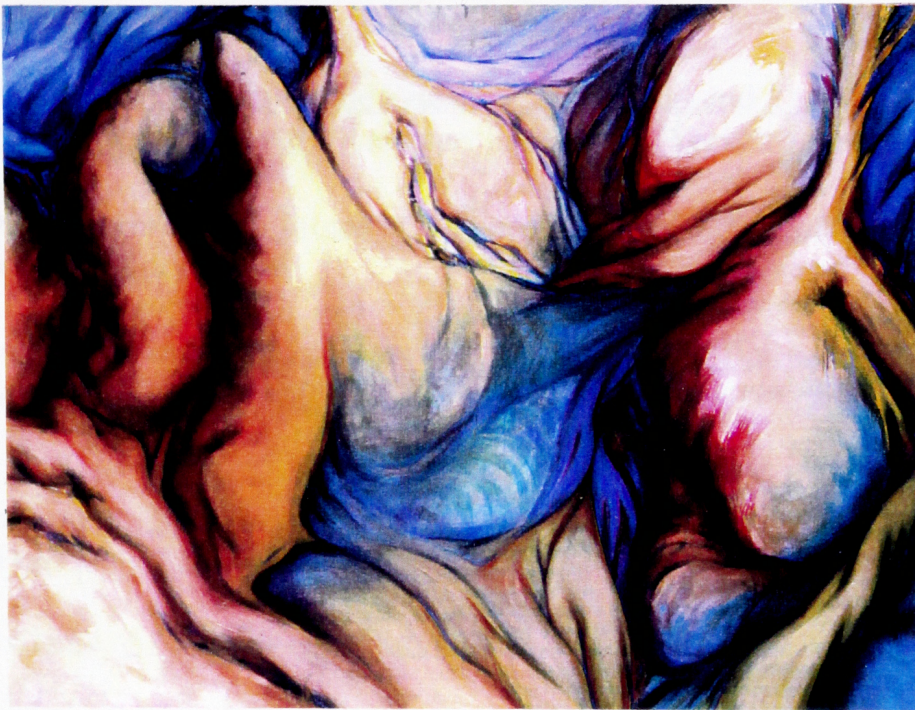


Plate 13



Plate 14

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